

Testimony of Lisa Sheppard, Fairfield, CT
Tuesday March 1, 2011
Before the
Appropriations Committee
Commenting on:

H.B. No. 6380 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2013

Good morning, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Representative Dillon, Senator Welch, Representative Miner and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony today on a most H.B. 6380. My name is Lisa Sheppard and I am a parent of a child with a special health care needs. His name is Blake, and he is 13 years old and he has life threatening conditions, autism and seizures. He is my hero and why I do the work that I do today. I also am an appointed member of the CT Family Support Council, I serve at your discretion in order to assist & help families who have children w/ Special Health Needs in all of Fairfield County.

H.B. No. 6380 would drastically impact the lives of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizen's it' children and our future, we often forget that in reviewing where we can trim the budget what affects that will take on families and children. I am here to tell you that the Commission on Children is anything but unnecessary or in need of a funding reduction, if anything at all, it should have it's funding restored. Last year at this time somehow 50% of their budget was taken away and yet they still brings in more federal and private dollars into our state than any other commission. In Fiscal Year 2011 every \$1 invested in the Commission on Children has produced an on heard of \$45 in federal and private funds to strengthen children, families and communities. What other agency or commission does this?

The Commission on Children has become a major state resource to state lawmakers, families and many state agencies that are otherwise at a loss to determine how best to support families. They have identified shortcomings in state systems, the insurance industry and health care services. The Commission's proposed annual budget would cost the state 90 cents per Connecticut child. With a staff of seven and a volunteer board, the office is lean. For that small investment, the Commission yields tremendous value in policy improvements for children and families, development of best practices, parent leadership training and volunteer hours, and return on investment.

The Commission is a member of the Family Support Council and has been a very active and dedicated resource for the work we do. There is no other resource like the Commission on Children in the state. Their ability to conduct rapid and thorough research keeps all of Connecticut informed about the circumstances of children and families as well as cutting edge solutions to problems families face. The Commission on Children has provided significant resources on bullying, obesity, violence and health care when those issues were only starting to be recognized for the problems they represent in children's lives. Reducing any more funding to the Commission on Children would not represent a savings in the budget. It would represent a loss of a critical resource and a connection to a great many other resources we can not do without at this time. I urge you to preserve the Commission on Children and even consider replacing the funding already taken away.

For the families I work with including my own little guy it takes a team approach to solving the complicated issues that these families face on a day-to-day basis. Which is why it is so important to keep intact some of the offices and commissions you are looking at reducing or eliminating completely. I would urge you to come and meet with the CT Family Support Council and use these very knowledgeable and talented people to keep you informed on the challenges that your families are going through and ask the questions you need to get answers to before you have to make these hard decisions like reducing funding on commissions such as the Commission on Children, who I might add works with and in combination with other Councils who support children. In the upcoming weeks, speak to various

members of the Commission on Children and the Family Support Council because they have some solutions that could be alternatively done to efficiently save the state budget crisis that would help children rather than slashing away at their advocates. In this very challenging time you need to know that when a family gets the devastating diagnosis of a life long disability for their child they go into a financial recession the likes that you have never seen. What we are facing in today's economy is a way of life for families with children who have medical needs...there is no stimulus package for them. When my son was diagnosed I lost my entire life savings caring for his needs and our lives changed forever. I rely on the various agencies, committees and councils I have mentioned today to help me navigate Connecticut's very complicated systems. And, I utilize each to help parents work together for the benefit of their children. And, I choose to work in this field because I didn't want new families who have children with disabilities to go through what I did.

I thank you for your time and attention. I certainly appreciate the grave challenge before you but I promise you that the Commission on Children, is a most under valued Commission that proves every year to be a hidden funding source for the state and that cost the state little and represents significant resources and even revenue for the State of Connecticut.



Age 13

Diagnosis:

Seizure Disorder: can die if not attended.

Asthma & Heart Murmur: Affects the
Life-Threatening Food Allergies: that are air-borne to all food groups being cooked in school cafeteria's impacts his education placement & needs to be in climate controlled classrooms with a nurse.

Autism: Significant will need one to one support for the rest of his life.

Gastrointestinal Problems and eating problems affects is ability to thrive and learn.